

VZCZCXRO5907  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHGB #3344/01 3611614  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 271614Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5909  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEILB/NCTC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003344

SIPDIS

S/CT FOR RHONDA SHORE; NCTC

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAQ: 2009 COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM

REF: SECSTATE 109980

¶1. Iraq remained a committed partner in counterterrorism efforts. As a result of the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement, Iraqi security forces assumed primary responsibility for the security and stability of Iraq, with support from Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I, which became U.S. Forces-Iraq (USF-I) as of January 1, 2010). Together, U.S. and Iraqi security forces continued to make progress in combating al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) and affiliated Sunni terrorist organizations, as well as Shiite militia elements engaged in terrorism. A significant reduction in the number of security incidents throughout much of Iraq, beginning in the last half of 2007, continued through 2009, with a steady downward trend in numbers of civilian casualties, enemy attacks, and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks.

¶2. Terrorist organizations and insurgent groups continued attacks on Iraqi security forces, civilians, and government officials using IEDs, including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), and suicide bombers. Although a scattering of small scale attacks continued to hamper the country's progress toward broad-based security, terrorist elements focused their efforts on high profile and deadly attacks in Baghdad, as demonstrated by attacks on August 19, October 25, and December 8, with an estimated combined death toll of around 250, according to media reports. The three attacks targeted Iraqi government buildings with simultaneous, multiple suicide and/or remote-detonated VBIEDs in Baghdad. While AQI claimed responsibility for the violence, some Iraqi government officials publicly blamed Syrian-based individuals with alleged ties to the former Baath Party for the violence.

¶3. U.S. forces conducted warranted and partnered full spectrum operations with the Iraqi forces to defeat the adaptive threats employed by AQI. Their efforts to defeat AQI cells, in addition to an increasingly violence weary Iraqi public, forced AQI elements to consolidate in Ninewa and Diyala provinces. Despite being limited to smaller bases of operation within Iraq, AQI retained networks in and around Baghdad and in eastern Anbar. In Ninewa, U.S. and Iraqi security forces focused operations against AQI and other Sunni extremists through warranted operations and judicial detentions of senior leaders, and targeting the terrorists, operational support systems. AQI, whose apparent goal in 2009 was to discredit the GOI and erode its security and governance capabilities, targeted primarily the Iraqi security forces, government infrastructure and civilians, SOI (Sons of Iraq) groups, and tribal awakening movement members. Despite the improved security environment, AQI, fueled in part by detainee recidivists, still possessed a limited capacity to launch high-profile attacks against Iraqi civilians and infrastructure. In addition to reducing the strength of AQI and Sunni extremists, Iraq made progress in containing other terrorist groups with differing motives,

such as Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandiyah (a Sunni nationalist insurgent group with links to the former Baath Party that advocates for the removal of occupation forces from Iraq) and Kata'ib Hizballah (a Shia militant group with ideological ties to the militant wing of Lebanese Hizballah), also operating in the country.

¶4. The flow of foreign terrorists from North Africa and other Middle Eastern countries sympathetic to Sunni extremists greatly diminished, though they continued to enter Iraq, predominantly through Syria. AQI and its Sunni extremist partners mainly used Iraqi nationals and some females as suicide bombers. Terrorist groups receiving weapons and training from Iran continued to endanger the security and stability of Iraq. However, incidents of such violence were markedly lower than in previous years. Many of the groups receiving ideological and logistical support from Iran were based in Shia communities in central and southern Iraq.

¶5. Iraqi government officials condemned terrorists from all quarters. Iraq, Turkey, and the United States continued their formal trilateral security dialogue as one element of ongoing cooperative efforts to counter the militant Kurdish nationalist group, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Iraqi leaders, including those from the Kurdistan Regional Government, continued to publicly state that the PKK was a terrorist organization and would not be allowed a safe haven in Iraq. The trilateral discussions and other efforts continued through the end of the year, with a ministerial in late December.

BAGHDAD 00003344 002 OF 003

¶6. The Iraqi government increased its efforts to garner regional and international support against the common threat of terrorism. The Expanded Neighbors Process continued to provide a forum in which Iraq and its neighbors could address the political and security challenges to further Iraq's development as a regional partner. In October, the Iraqi government sent representatives to Egypt to participate in the sixth Neighbors Process working group on border security, in which the group sought ways to enhance and integrate border security systems in preparation for Iraq's 2010 parliamentary elections. Iraq became a more active voice at the UN, advocating for international support as a means to combat terrorism in Iraq.

¶7. Perceived Iraqi government political targeting of SOI and Awakening Council members threatened to harm efforts to consolidate national unity. Terrorists continued attacks on SOI members and on Sunni populations sympathetic to reconciliation. In November, gunmen dressed in Iraqi Army uniforms killed at least 13 Sunnis in the Sunni-dominated district of Abu Ghraib, in west Baghdad. The same month, an IED killed three SOI members and wounded six while they were responding to a tip about a weapons cache south of Baghdad. Iraqi press reports indicated that the local perception of nationwide violence increased, while the actual amount of violence, including the numbers of killed and wounded, dropped steadily. Importantly, the perception of greater threat did not create a violent response on the part of Sunnis or Shia.

¶8. The Iraqi government pressed senior Iranian leaders to end support for lethal aid to Iraqi militias, and the Iraqi army carried out operations against extremists trained and equipped by Iran in Basra, Baghdad, and other areas. Although attacks by militants have sharply decreased, concerns remain that Iranian-supported Shia groups may be stockpiling weapons to influence the elections or the subsequent government formation. Shia militant groups' ties to Iran remained a diplomatic and security challenge and a threat to Iraq's long-term stability. National unity efforts to involve Iraqi Shia groups with Iranian ties, such as Asaib

ahl al Haq (League of Righteousness) in the political process, also decreased Shia-linked violence. The Iraqi government faced internal and external pressure to relocate the Mujahideen al-Khalq (MEK) organization, a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization, from the group's current location in eastern Iraq. The MEK is an Islamic-Marxist group that originated in Iran and seeks the overthrow of the Iranian government. The Iraqi government committed to act with respect for human rights in any efforts to relocate the group, and UN and international observers monitored the situation.

¶9. The Iraqi government attributed security gains to Iraqi security force capability and proficiency, as well as to increasing popular support for Iraqi government actions against AQI and other extremist groups. SOI and other groups provided U.S. and Iraqi forces with valuable information that helped disrupt terrorist operations and exposed large weapons caches. The SOI began integration into Iraqi security forces in 2008, and many more transitioned to non-security ministries throughout 2009. Sunni tribal awakening movements continued alliances with U.S. forces against AQI and extremist groups. Reports of AQI targeting of Christian churches and schools, as well as other ethnic and religious Qchurches and schools, as well as other ethnic and religious minority facilities, indicated that AQI and other terrorist elements sought different strategies to determine which required the least resources and yielded the highest payoff in the media and minds of Iraq's citizens. Despite this, ethno-sectarian violence continued to decline.

¶10. The Iraqi security forces continued to build tactical and operational momentum and assumed responsibility for security in all of Iraq's 18 provinces. On June 30, U.S. forces pulled out of cities, villages, and localities, in accordance with the Security Agreement, and henceforth conducted all kinetic operations in partnership with Iraqi security forces. The focus of U.S. operations moved from urban to rural areas. The Security Agreement is the legal basis for continued security cooperation to help Iraq build its capacity to fight terrorist organizations and establish formal mechanisms for joint security operations. International support will remain critical for the Iraqi government to build its capacity to fight terrorist organizations.

¶11. Iraq's intelligence services continued to improve in both competency and confidence, but will require ongoing

BAGHDAD 00003344 003 OF 003

support and legislative authority before they will be able to adequately identify and respond to internal and external terrorist threats.  
FORD